

Message Text

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UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 3 BANGKOK 14366/1

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SUBJECT: PROPOSED AGRI-BUSINESS EXHIBITION JANUARY 1979

REF: (A) USDOC 8938, (B) USDOC 10103

BEGIN SUMMARY: THAILAND'S GROWING AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY

OFFERS SUBSTANTIAL SALES OPPORTUNITIES FOR U.S. EXPORTERS. WHILE THE POTENTIAL SALES OF AGRICULTURAL MACHINERY APPEAR TO BE SOMEWHAT LIMITED, PROSPECTS FOR FOOD PROCESSING AND PACKAGING EQUIPMENT, GRAIN STORAGE, DRYING AND HANDLING EQUIPMENT, POWER SPRAYERS, INCUBATORS, POULTRY FEEDERS, ANIMAL HEALTH PRODUCTS, INSECTICIDES AND FERTILIZERS AND OTHERS APPEAR TO BE EXCELLENT. EMBASSY STRONGLY RECOMMENDS THAT A CONTRACT FOR AN AGRI-BUSINESS MARKET RESEARCH STUDY BE NEGOTIATED AS PLANNED. END SUMMARY.

1. TO RESPOND TO THE MANY QUESTIONS ASKED IN REFTELS, EMBOFFS HAVE HELD MEETINGS WITH LOCAL AMERICAN AND NON-AMERICAN REPRESENTATIVES OF VARIOUS SECTORS OF AGRI-INDUSTRIES IN THAILAND. WHILE OUR FINDINGS ARE ENCOURAGING, THE SUCCESS OF SUBJECT EXHIBITION CANNOT BE GUARANTEED OR ASSURED. A MARKET STUDY IS CONSIDERED UNCLASSIFIED

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ESSENTIAL.

2. THERE ARE A HALF DOZEN WELL-QUALIFIED MARKET RESEARCH FIRMS IN BANGKOK, ALL OF WHICH HAVE CAPABLE FOREIGN AND THAI STAFF. EMBOFFS HAVE DISCUSSED STUDY IN GENERAL TERMS WITH THREE FIRMS. THEY ARE PERHAPS UNDERSTANDABLY ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT UNDERTAKING THE AGRI-BUSINESS STUDY

AND EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE A PROFESSIONAL JOB CAN BE COMPLETED WITHIN A FOUR MONTH PERIOD. HOWEVER, THE FIRMS WOULD LIKE TO SEE SPECIFICATIONS BEFORE MAKING COMMITMENTS. THEY POINTED OUT TIME FACTOR IN COMPLETION OF STUDY WOULD DEPEND LARGELY ON SCOPE. IF A LARGE NUMBER OF INDUSTRIAL SECTORS ARE EXAMINED, IT WOULD NATURALLY TAKE LONGER AND COST MORE THAN A STUDY MORE NARROWLY DEFINED.

3. SINCE CHINESE NEW YEAR FALLS ON JANUARY 29, EMBASSY SUGGESTS SECOND WEEK IN FEBRUARY AS THE BEST TIME FOR THE EXHIBITION.

4. AUSTRALIA DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE A MAJOR COMPETITOR FOR AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT. THAILAND, REACTING TO HIGH WORLD SUGAR PRICES, PURCHASED A LARGE NUMBER OF CANE HARVESTERS AND SUGAR MILL EQUIPMENT IN 1975 WHICH INFLATED STATISTICS ON ITS AUSTRALIAN IMPORTS FOR THAT YEAR. THESE PURCHASES WERE NOT TIED TO ANY AUSTRALIAN AID.

5. SIX IRRIGATION PROJECTS PLANNED FOR COMPLETION BY 1981 WILL PROVIDE WATER TO 314,000 HECTARES (777,100 ACRES) OF ADDITIONAL LAND WHICH, UNIMPROVED, IS CONSIDERED TO HAVE ONLY MARGINAL USE FOR FARMING. UNDER RTG'S LAND REFORM PROGRAM, THIS LAND WILL BE DIVIDED INTO SMALL PLOTS OF APPROXIMATELY 20-25 ACRES EACH. ADDITIONAL MACHINERY WILL BE REQUIRED TO PLOW THIS LAND BUT, EXCEPT FOR THE UNCLASSIFIED

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INITIAL PLOWING WHERE LARGE U.S. TRACTORS CAN BE USED MOST EFFECTIVELY, THE SMALLER 45-55 HP TRACTORS NOT NOW EXPORTED FROM THE U.S. ARE LIKELY TO BE PURCHASED FOR SUBSEQUENT PLOWING.

6. EMBASSY AGREES THAT U.S. MARKET SHARE IN THAILAND'S IMPORTS OF AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT IS QUITE SMALL, PERHAPS EVEN SMALLER THAN THAT SUGGESTED IN REFTEL B. THAILAND'S SOPHISTICATION OF FARMING TECHNIQUES LAGS FAR BEHIND THE DEVELOPED WORLD AND ARE PERHAPS AS PRIMITIVE AS ANY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. THOUSANDS OF THAI FARMERS CULTIVATE VERY SMALL ACREAGE USING ONLY THE WATER BUFFALO. IN RECENT YEARS MANY HAVE GRADUATED TO THE USE OF SMALL TILLERS (TRACTORS OF 12-30 HORSEPOWER) OF WHICH THERE ARE MORE THAN 27,000 IN USE TODAY. THE FARMERS THEN GRADUATE TO THE 45-55 HORSEPOWER TRACTORS WHICH ARE IMPORTED AT THE RATE OF 3,000 TO 4,000 ANNUALLY. THESE MEDIUM SIZED TRACTORS, BEARING SUCH US BRAND NAMES AS FORD, INTERNATIONAL HARVESTER AND JOHN DEER, ARE LARGELY PRODUCED IN EUROPE AND ASSEMBLED IN THAILAND. INTERNATIONAL HARVESTER, FOR EXAMPLE, SEES IN THAILAND A POTENTIAL THAT IS FOURTH LARGEST IN ASIA BEHIND INDIA, JAPAN AND AUSTRALIA.

HOWEVER, THE U.S. MANUFACTURED TRACTOR, WHICH IS IN EXCESS OF 70 HORSEPOWER, IS NOT ONLY MORE EXPENSIVE BUT VERY FEW THAI FARMERS ARE FARMING LAND SUFFICIENTLY LARGE ENOUGH TO JUSTIFY SUCH AN EXPENSIVE PIECE OF MACHINERY. THE MARKET IN THAILAND APPEARS TO BE EVEN SMALLER FOR SUCH EQUIPMENT AS THRASHERS, PLOWS (AND ATTACHMENTS), HARVESTERS, CULTIVATORS, COMBINES ETC. FOR A BETTER ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SALES POTENTIAL FOR AGRICULTURAL MACHINERY AND EQUIPMENT IN THAILAND, EMBASSY SUGGESTS USDOC REVIEW A STUDY OF THIS PRODUCT CATEGORY PREPARED BY DR. MANK MOBIUS FOR USDOC IN MARCH 1971. WHILE THIS STUDY IS OBVIOUSLY DATED, MUCH OF IT IS STILL VALID.

7. FROM THAI CUSTOMS STATISTICS, IT APPEARS U.S. RANKS UNCLASSIFIED

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THIRD BEHIND JAPAN AND EUROPE (WEST GERMANY, ITALY, UNITED KINGDOM, SCANDINAVIA, AUSTRALIA, ETC.) IN SELLING FPP MACHINERY AND EQUIPMENT TO THAILAND. FOR FOOD PROCESSING EQUIPMENT, THE U.S. SHARE SEEMS TO BE ROUGHLY 20 PERCENT AND FOR FOOD PACKAGING EQUIPMENT IT APPEARS TO BE ABOUT 10 PERCENT. IT IS DIFFICULT TO SAY WITH AUTHORITY WHETHER THE U.S. MARKET SHARES OF BOTH CATEGORIES IS INCREASING OR DECLINING. THE THAI MARKET IS EXTREMELY SPOTTY AND SALES OF THIS TYPE OF EQUIPMENT FLUCTUATE WIDELY FROM ONE YEAR TO THE NEXT DEPENDING ON WHEN NEW OR EXPANSION PROJECTS ARE IMPLEMENTED.

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8. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF PINEAPPLE PROCESSING AND CANNING EQUIPMENT FOR WHICH THE U.S. HAS AN ALMOST VIRTUAL MONOPOLY, AMERICAN FPP EQUIPMENT FACES STIFF COMPETITION FROM EUROPE AND TO A LESSER EXTENT FROM JAPAN. DURING THE PAST FEW YEARS, MOST AGRI-BUSINESS PROJECTS IN THAILAND WERE JOINT VENTURES WITH THE JAPANESE AND TAIWANESE, WITH THE FACTORIES EMPLOYING JAPANESE OR TAIWANESE MANAGERS. THESE MANAGERS BOUGHT EQUIPMENT FROM THEIR OWN COUNTRY WHENEVER POSSIBLE. MOST OF THE 100 PERCENT THAI OWNED FPP OPERATIONS PURCHASED THEIR INITIAL LINES FROM TAIWAN OR JAPAN FOR 30 TO 50 PERCENT OF THE COST OF EUROPEAN OR AMERICAN EQUIPMENT. THIS WAS DURING THE START-UP PERIOD WHEN PRICE WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION FOR THESE FIRMS. NOW, FOUR OR FIVE YEARS LATER, MANY ARE LOOKING FOR REPLACEMENTS WHICH WILL LAST LONGER THAN FIVE YEARS DESPITE THE HIGHER PRICE. IN ADDITION, THE PRICE OF JAPANESE EQUIPMENT IS RAPIDLY APPROACHING THOSE OF EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN SUPPLIERS, WHILE PERCEIVED QUALITY HAS NOT INCREASED COMMENSURATELY. TAIWA-MADE EQUIPMENT, WHICH IS MUCH CHEAPER, GERALLY HAS A POOR REPUTATION FOR RELIABILITY AND EFFICIENCY.

9. AMERICAN FPP EQUIPMENT IS NOT CONSIDERED TOO EXPENSIVE NOR TOO SOPHISTICATED FOR THE THAI MARKET. HOWEVER, THERE ARE SOME TYPES THAT HAVE TOO LARGE A

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CAPACITY OR ARE TOO AUTOMATED WITH RESPECT TO THE AVAILABILITY OF RELATIVELY CHEAPER LABOR HERE, BUT THE YEAR AROUND AVAILABILITY OF LARGE AMOUNTS OF LABOR IS BECOMING MORE OF A PROBLEM IN RURAL THAILAND. FOR EXAMPLE, SOME OF THE LARGE PINEAPPLE GROWERS ARE INSTALLING LOCALLY ASSEMBLED CONVEYOR SYSTEMS TO SEMI-AUTOMATE THE TRANSPORTATION FROM THE FIELD VIA A CONVEYOR TO REDUCE RELIANCE ON UNRELIABLE LABOR. LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS ARE BECOMING MORE AWARE OF THE NEED FOR ATTRACTIVE PACKAGING FOR EXPORT. MANY REALIZE THAT THE SHORT LIFE SPAN, EXPENSIVE SPARE PARTS AND INEFFICIENT, HIGH FUEL-CONSUMPTION OF TAIWANESE AND JAPANESE EQUIPMENT IS A RELATIVELY POOR VALUE IN THE LONG RUN DESPITE THE LOW INITIAL COST. THUS, MANY ARE BEGINNING TO TURN TOWARD U.S./EUROPEAN MANUFACTURED PRODUCTS.

10. EMBASSY BELIEVES THE MARKET IN THAILAND FOR CERTAIN TYPES OF AMERICAN FPP MACHINERY WILL OFFER EXCELLENT SALES OPPORTUNITIES OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS. CANNERS OF PINEAPPLE WILL BE REPLACING WORN OUT TAIWANESE AND JAPANESE EQUIPMENT AND CANNING OF OTHER VEGETABLES (CORN, MUSHROOM, TOMATO, ONION, ETC.,) AND TO A LESSER

EXTENT TROPICAL FRUITS WILL INCREASINGLY PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR U.S. EQUIPMENT SUPPLIERS. CANNING OF SEAFOOD AND MEAT (BEEF, CHICKEN, PORK) ALSO OFFERS FUTURE POTENTIAL FOR INCREMENTAL SALES OF PROCESSING MACHINERY. NEW INDUSTRIES BASED ON EDIBLE VEGETABLE OILS, STARCH, GLUCOSE AND ALCOHOL FROM TAPIOCA AND MAIZE, AND OTHER NEW PRODUCTS SUCH AS NUTS, UPLAND FRUITS, COFFEE AND COCOA, ETC., WILL IN TIME CREATE PROSPECTIVE MARKETS FOR AMERICAN EQUIPMENT.

11.U.S. PRODUCED FOOD PROCESSING AND PACKAGING EQUIPMENT
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IS NOT AT A COMPETITIVE DISADVANTAGE IN THAILAND. AS A MATTER OF FACT, GIVEN THE HIGH REGARD FOR AMERICAN TECHNOLOGY AND LEVEL OF EFFICIENCY, LONG OPERATING LIFE OF U.S. EQUIPMENT, COUPLED WITH AN INCREASING ORIENTATION TOWARD U.S. OF YOUNG FACTORY MANAGERS EDUCATED IN THE STATES, EMBASSY BELIEVES AMERICAN PRODUCTS ARE COMPETITIVE. ON THE OTHER HAND, LESS COMPETITIVE FINANCING, POOR PROMOTION OF U.S. PRODUCTS BY MANUFACTURERS AND AGENTS PLUS PAST ORIENTATION TOWARDS JAPAN AND TAIWAN REPRESENT GREAT CHALLENGES FOR U.S. SUPPLIERS.

12. WITH A VERY FEW EXCEPTIONS, AMERICAN FPP EQUIPMENT IS NOT CURRENTLY PROMOTED AGGRESSIVELY IN THAILAND. A FEW U.S. (MULLER AND PHIPPS) AND EUROPEAN (RIECKERMANN) TRADING FIRMS ARE EFFECTIVE BUT MOST THAI AGENTS ARE NOT SUFFICIENTLY AGGRESSIVE. MANY U.S. MANUFACTURERES, NOT REPRESENTED BY A SINGLE AGENT IN THAILAND, SEEM TO PREFER TO SELL DIRECTLY TO LOCAL END-USERS. THIS LACK OF INTEREST AND/OR LIMITED EFFORT HAS VIRTUALLY GIVEN THE HUNGRIER EUROPEANS, JAPANESE AND TAIWANESE MUCH OF THE BUSINESS WITHOUT A FIGHT. EFFECTIVE AGENTS TODAY FREQUENTLY MUST BE ABLE TO PROVIDE A COMPLETE TURN-KEY PLANT, AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, THEY MUST BE PREPARED TO OFFER FINANCING PACKAGES AS WELL. MOST OF THE AGENTS OF AMERICAN FPP EQUIPMENT WITH WHOM THE EMBASSY TALKED SAID THEY WOULD BE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN A MAJOR EXHIBITION, SUBJECT, OF COURSE, TO THE AGREEMENT OF THEIR PRINCIPALS. THEY ARE: RIECKERMANN WHICH REPRESENTS ANGELUS (CAN SEALING MACHINES), ATLAS PACIFIC (SYRUP FILLING MACHINES), EMHART (LABELLING MACHINES), PFAUDLER (JUICE FILLING MACHINES) AND HONOMACH (PINEAPPLE PROCESSING EQUIPMENT); ROCKSAND, A U.S. FIRM, REPRESENTING KOCH (MEAT PACKING EQUIPMENT) AND HENRY VOGT (ICE MAKING MACHINES); SPECIALTY ENGINEERING, A THAI FIRM, REPRESENTING RELIANCE (TOLEDO BRAND WEIGHING SCALES); AND MULLER AND PHIPPS (A U.S. FIRM) REPRESENTING FMC
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(FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PROCESSING AND CANNING EQUIPMENT).

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13. IN ADDITION TO FOOD PROCESSING AND PACKAGING EQUIPMENT, THE MARKET RESEARCH STUDY SHOULD SPECIFICALLY INDICATE A MEASURABLE POTENTIAL FOR SALES IN THAILAND OF THE FOLLOWING PRODUCT GROUPS: GRAIN STORAGE, DRYING AND HANDLING EQUIPMENT; IRRIGATION (INCLUDING PUMPS, VALVES, PIPES, NOZZELS, ETC.) SYSTEMS AND EQUIPMENT; POWER SPRAYER EQUIPMENT; INCUBATORS, AUTOMATIC POULTRY FEEDERS AND HATCHERY ELECTRONIC CONTROL SYSTEMS; ANIMAL FEED GRINDING AND MIXING EQUIPMENT; ANIMAL HEALTH PRODUCTS AND ANIMAL FEED CHEMICAL SUPPLEMENTS; VEGETABLE OIL EXTRACTION EQUIPMENT; INSECTICIDES AND FERTILIZERS. GROWING AT AN ANNUAL RATE OF 30 PERCENT, THE POULTRY INDUSTRY SHOWS PARTICULAR PROMISE. THE MARKET FOR ANIMAL HEALTH PRODUCTS, CURRENTLY ESTIMATED AT \$25 MILLION ANNUALLY, ALSO OFFER SUBSTANTIAL SALES OPPORTUNITIES FOR U.S. COMAPNIES WHICH ALREADY ENJOY ABOUT 50 PERCENT OF THE MARKET. THE ANNUAL GROWTH RATE OF THIS MARKET IS ESTIMATED BY KNOWLEDGEABLE PEOPLE IN THE INDUSTRY TO BE ABOUT 30 PERCENT.

14. THE USAID PROGRAM IN THAILAND IS PRIMARILY ORIENTED TOWARD ASSISTING THE EEVELOPMENT OF THE RURAL SECTOR WITH VARIOUS ACTIVE PROGRAMS WORKING CLOSELY WITH THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND OTHER THAI GOVERNMENT

ORGANIZATIONS. THESE PROGRAMS INCLUDE
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OOVIENNO ADVISORS
TO DEVELOP AN ANALYTICAL SYSTEM FOR AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS,
PROVIDING FIVE MILLION DOLLARS TO THE BANK OF AGRICULTURE
TO SUPPLY LONG TERM CREDIT TO FARMERS, AND FINANCING A
SERIES OF STUDIES FOR PRIORITY PROJECTS IN THE RURAL
ELECTRIFICATION AND WATER RESOURCE AREAS. AID ALSO
RECENTLY FINANCED SIX STUDIES TO BE UNDERTAKEN BY
CHEMONICS, A U.S. FIRM, TO RECOMMEND SPECIFIC INVESTMENT
PROJECTS IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS: LEATHER, MEAT PRODUCTS,
SEED AND ESSENTIAL OILS, MAIZE, RUBBER AND PROCESSED FOOD
FOR EXPORT. THESE STUDIES ARE SCHEDULED TO BE COMPLETED
BY THE END OF MARCH, 1978 AND WILL BE USED BY THE THAI
BOARD OF INVESTMENT TO ENCOURAGE FOREIGN AND THAI INVESTMENT
IN NEW AGRI-BUSINESS PROJECTS, WHICH, IN TURN, SHOULD
CREATE A DEMAND FOR U.S. EQUIPMENT AND SERVICES.

15. EMBASSY RECOGNIZES THERE ARE MANY UNCERTAINTIES IN
DETERMINING POTENTIAL U.S. MARKET SHARE FOR AGRICULTURAL,
FOOD PROCESSING AND PACKAGING EQUIPMENT. WE MUST BEAR
IN MIND THAT EXPANSION OF AGRI-BUSINESS IS LOGICALLY THE NEXT
STEP FOR THAILAND AND IT WOULD BE UNFORTUNATE IF U.S.
FIRMS DID NOT SHARE IN THIS GROWING MARKET. THE PROPOSED
EXHIBITION WOULD BE A CATALYST TO INTRODUCE AMERICAN
PRODUCTS, STIMULATE INTEREST OF THAI BUSINESSMEN AND
COMPLEMENT USAID EFFORTS TO PROMOTE EXPANSION OF AGRICULTURE
IN THIS PREDOMINANTLY AGRICULTURAL COUNTRY.
EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THIS ASSURANCE CAN ONLY BE OBTAINED
AFTER A THOROUGH EXAMINATION OF THE FACTS OBTAINED FROM
THE PROPOSED IN-DEPTH MARKET RESEARCH STUDY. EMBASSY,
THEREFORE, STRONGLY RECOMMENDS THAT A CONTRACT FOR THE
MARKET STUDY BE NEGOTIATED AS PLANNED.
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